

Paul R. Hinlicky, *Luther and the Beloved Community: A Path for Christian Theology after Christendom*. Eerdmans, 2010. ISBN 978-0-8028-6492-5.

There can be no doubt at all that Paul Hinlicky knows Luther, and Lutheran theology, extraordinarily well. Nor can there be any doubt about the fact that the present volume is not what my Systematic Theology Professor back in College called 'Dukes of Hazzard Reading'. 'Dukes of Hazzard Reading' refers to books, essays, or articles that are easy and undemanding. This book is not of that sort. It requires rather a lot of the person bold enough to dive in head first. Such a trusting soul, seeing the calm water of the surface, will forget that there are jagged rocks right below the surface and those may shred the skin or worse. Hinlicky shreds upon impact. And what he shreds are preconceptions of Luther and his relevance for modern theology.

In the Preface Hinlicky delimits his goals and interests. Simple sounding enough- unless you know what a monstrous task he has taken upon himself. He wishes to scale the Himalayas with only a few supplies and lots of grit.

Part One examines Luther's Creedal Theology by investigating such topics as the problem of Christian belief in Europe and America; critical dogmatics and the task of interpretation; and saints amid boas and crocodiles (boa constrictors, not the sort of boa Liza Minelli made famous); Luther's Chalcedonian Christology; the whole difficult subject of expiation v. propitiation; and the Trinity!

If one survives that adventure, then one may be a bit harder pressed to come away intellectually unscathed from Part Two where H. delves into anthropology. Here he takes aim at Zwingli, using him as essentially nothing more than a wall off of which he can bounce Luther's ideas. Then he goes at the whole issue of marriage in Luther's thought and how that theology of marriage can be translated into modern society.

I tried to suggest above that H. is climbing high peaks. But he hasn't finished yet. And while Part One, and for that matter Part Two, are enough fodder for multiple volumes, H. still has more to say- on Justification, the Church, and political theology.

Amazingly, though, H. manages to handle what he bites off. I don't know how. He treats each topic with genuine seriousness and even though I don't think he really understands Zwingli as well as he should, he does manage to make Luther speak to postmodern Christianity.

Still, my glowing sentiments for his remarkable achievement notwithstanding, I feel obliged to look in depth in particular at his treatment of Zwingli's theology of providence.

In chapter five H. wrestles with Luther and Zwingli's notions concerning predestination and providence. More precisely, he uses Zwingli as a means by which to attempt to understand Luther's rightly famous and rightly difficult 'On the Bondage of the Will'.

*When we read Luther and Zwingli side by side, the features of what precisely Luther intended to say to his own day and age become much crisper (p. 141).*

But this is a problematic approach for a number of reasons. First, reading Luther with the aid of Zwingli, or Zwingli with the aid of Luther is at best a hazardous enterprise since both of them were prone, because of their mutual disdain, to misread each other. Setting them side by side didn't work for the Prince, and it won't really work for us either. Second, this 'Tatian-ization' doesn't serve the Reformers any more than it serves the Gospels. And finally, this methodology doesn't allow Zwingli to be fully Zwingli nor Luther to be fully Luther. Either the Reformers stand (or fall) on their own terms, or they won't be truly grasped.

Luther's aim in 'Bondage' is nothing like Zwingli's aim in 'On Providence'. Therefore, in my estimation, attempting to read them in tandem is unhelpful and potentially even misleading.

Nonetheless, H. does an absolutely brilliant job in explaining Luther's purpose in 'On the Bondage of the Will'. And he does it because of a fascinating insight- that Luther's treatise is 'Apocalyptic Theology'. H. writes of 'The Bondage...'

*... to understand Luther's meaning, we must read this most 'systematic' and 'philosophical' of his writings as theology, revealed theology, apocalyptic theology (p. 156).*

That naturally raises the question, for me, as to why Zwingli was brought in to the discussion in the first place. Mere foil? Whipping boy? H. turns his attention to Zwingli more intentionally a few pages on- on page 162ff, under the heading 'Zwingli's Alternative Case for the Decentered Self' but this treatment unfairly portrays Zwingli as more philosopher than theologian. For example, H. quotes Zwingli as follows-

*"This evil strife [concerning free will] could be concluded immediately, if men would once turn to the contemplation of the Deity as the safest bulwark of religion. The supreme good is the Deity". This text coming in the middle of De providential Dei is the key to its interpretation, harkening back as it does to the opening thesis, 'Providence must exist, because the supreme good necessarily cares for and regulates all things...' (p. 163).*

All of which makes Zwingli seem to appear to base his entire argument on philosophy and human reason. Far more useful an analysis, which takes seriously Zwingli's theological agenda and his use of philosophical terminology in a purely secondary role, is W.P. Stephens' in his *The Theology of Huldrych Zwingli*, pp 86ff.

Unfortunately, the reader of H.'s volume won't be able to check the references to Zwingli's 'On Providence' which he cites on page 163 because the notes all point erroneously to Luther's 'On the Bondage of the Will'. Those unfamiliar with Zwingli's work will want to look for themselves and then decide for themselves if H. has gotten Zwingli right, and that will only be possible when the erroneous footnotes are corrected.

Furthermore, H. seems to be dependent on Ulrich Gäbler's 1986 (English translation) volume for his understanding of Zwingli's thoughts on the topic and neither mentions the superior work of Stephens nor Locher, neither of whom can safely be ignored in any discussion of Zwingli's thought.

Indeed, Zwingli's works themselves are never cited directly, but only from the very inadequate and dated translation of Jackson from 1922! This is the greatest weakness of H.'s work. Contrast that with the copious citations of a variety of Luther's works and the problem becomes immediately apparent. Luther is given far more latitude than Zwingli and consequently Zwingli comes off the worse for it. If H. had restricted his examination of Luther's doctrine of election to only one treatise, it would result in a much different picture of that man's theology. The same is true, of course, for Zwingli. He has as rich a literary output as Luther and yet if someone approaching H.'s volume at this juncture had never heard of Zwingli he or she would be left with the impression that he only ever wrote one thing.

As informed as H. is concerning current Luther research, his apparent familiarity with Zwingli research is far too narrow and outdated.

Still, the entirety of H.'s work is very well done and very, very worthwhile. It may have its problems and its weaknesses but those don't detract overly much from the importance of this volume.

*Reviewed by Jim West*